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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a first-year, second-semester composition course that develops thinking, reading, and writing skills both on an individual and on a group level; it is designed to enhance research and writing skills developed in the first-semester course. With this and the departmental course requirements in mind, according to the paper, the curriculum was structured around a semester-long project. The paper explains that the class partners brainstorm topics for the project, discuss the topics dismissing those which are not feasible and elevate those which are, and reach a consensus on personal interest and expertise--the final required product is the publication of the project on the Internet. The prompts to start the project are detailed in the paper, as well as ancillary assignments which build the research inquiry skills needed for the project. The paper also includes examples of specific classes and their interactions. A syllabus is attached. (NKA)

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ED 445 341

Constructing Composition and Critical Thinking.

by David Beach

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CS 217 252

CONSTRUCTING COMPOSITION AND CRITICAL THINKING

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INTRODUCTION

Once most college students walk away with their diplomas, they will have to work with others in conceiving, developing, and executing ideas. This means they have to think together, work together, and write together. Most of our teaching is done one-on-one, and in one direction. Teachers give information. Students write. Teachers evaluate. Students pass or fail. Where do students learn to conceive, develop, and execute together? Almost always outside of the classroom. Why not bring that *into* the classroom?

This is precisely what Constructing Composition and Critical Thinking is all about. This is a first year, second semester composition course that develops thinking, reading, and writing skills both on an individual and on a group level. It is also a course where the class partners create their own group project from conception to delivery. The project can be anything within the realm of reason as long as the departmental requirements for successful completion of the course are met.

The second semester course is designed to enhance research and writing skills developed in the first semester course. With this and the departmental course requirements in mind, I structured a curriculum around a semester-long project. The classroom becomes a research and development office. The class partners brainstorm topics for the project, discuss the topics dismissing those which are infeasible and elevate those which are, and lobby their partners to reach consensus on a topic. With topic in hand, the class partners then explore the topic to find their own areas of personal interest and expertise. This project involves not only the research; administrative elements of the project (facilitation, recording and distributing information, activity coordination, and publication and design) must be considered and assigned. The final required product is the publication of the project on the Internet.

Our goal as teachers is not only to ensure that students "understand" what they read but also that they probe the ideas in their reading, and work with and against its complexities by exploring them in writing. Writing in a vacuum, this just doesn't work as effectively as we would want. Even in a thematic course, students have to buy into the theme unless they have pre-selected the course.

There is a buy-in with Constructing Composition, too. Most students are skeptical at best about the project after the first class, but are excited about doing something different in an English class, and within the first few weeks, most have bought into the project because of their personal stakes.

Even though students have overwhelmingly enjoyed this course, some have not. I discuss learning styles at the first class session. I suggest that students who are uncomfortable working in group environments or in a new mode switch to a different section or defer the course to another semester. Sometimes, this is not an option. Two of the 75 students who have participated in these projects stayed in the course because they had no alternative class to attend due to scheduling or curricular requirements. Neither felt the course was beneficial or educational. And as in any group setting, their lack of enthusiasm and/or involvement affected the group in some way. Although one of the two students attempted to sabotage the project at every turn, the "invisible hand" of the group thwarted the attempts.

Over and over again, I heard the vast majority of the students say the course was the best English class they had ever had. Why? I think it's because they were allowed a voice in what they learned, and they used that voice to discover. The students discussed what they were doing, thought through the steps critically, and communicated their aims to the others both orally and in writing since the onus was on the class, not the teacher, to accomplish the course goals. Although the parameters were no different than previous courses I've taught, more writing evolved from this project than from a "normal" class.

I have found my own teaching style to have changed radically (and for the better). After having being conspicuously unauthoritative during the pilot class, I decided to predefine my role as the *guide* and *mentor*--available for consultation, keeping the project on track, and providing constant feedback--instead of the *teacher*. Even in our nomenclature, there are distinct perceptive differences in these terms. The *teacher* has an authoritative mantle that can be either positive or negative. If we *guide* or *mentor* our students to knowledge and critical skills, we maintain the authority (by virtue of our position), but the atmosphere becomes a two-way invigorating exchange of ideas.

I also decided to be amongst the students. Although we meet in seminar rooms, I rarely sit at the "head" of the classroom, the side of the table near the board. Moving around the room and sitting next to different students every day break down some of the teacher-student barrier more than any other devices I have used.

Administratively, I have encountered few obstacles. The university is, rightfully so, concerned with liability issues. For any event that occurs outside the classroom, students sign a general release from liability form. For any fundraising or programs outside the university, the administration should authorize these in advance.

The next two pages detail the prompts to start the project as well as ancillary assignments which build the research/inquiry skills that are needed for the project.

THE ASSIGNMENT

Here are the guidelines:

The College Writing Program *Faculty Handbook* states that students in LIT-101 are required to write "a minimum of 25 pages of polished, formal writing" which should incorporate field observations, interviews or surveys, textual research (books and academic journals), and online research. "By the end of a course, students should be dealing with a writing project of sufficient complexity and depth to require an appropriate mix of 'more than a handful' of sources."

You will write approximately 15 pages with the response papers, which leaves you with a minimum requirement of 10 more pages to write. A word of wisdom: minimum translates to satisfactorily meeting requirements whether those requirements be number of pages, amount of work, number of players needed for a league game, number of screws holding a boat together, the number of safety measures built into a car, or the number of random tests to determine condom effectiveness and durability. Ask yourself this question: "Would I feel completely safe in an automobile that meets the minimum federal safety requirements?"

So with that said, what are my expectations? I expect you to have written a minimum of 25 pages of polished, formal writing which incorporates field observations, interviews or surveys, textual research, and online research. I expect you to think critically. I expect you to work collaboratively. I expect you to learn some writing, thinking, and working skills that will carry you through life.

I know a big question is "How will I be evaluated?" The answer is both simple and complicated: I will evaluate your written work, and we all will evaluate what we do.

Seventy-five percent of the project grade will be my evaluation of the written work you produce.

At the end of the semester, you will be asked to evaluate each member of the class as to his or her contribution to the group project. You will also evaluate yourself, and I will evaluate you as well; all three evaluations will count as 25% of the project grade calculation. Together, the two grades will count for three-quarters of the course grade. Consequently, not everyone will receive the same grade for the group project. This puts a lot of responsibility on you and your peers, but I guarantee that you will leave this course keenly aware of not only how to evaluate critically but also how to write with a critical awareness of purpose, audience, and content.

Now, what do you want to do?

THE ANCILLARY ASSIGNMENT

E-JOURNALS

The e-journal entries should be reflective freewrites on what we are doing in class, what you are reading, or what you are struggling with in your writing. You can be creative (write poetry or dialogue or narrative), talk (write) through some problematic aspect of what we are reading or what you are writing or what you are trying to write, tie together what we're reading to something else, tie readings together, continue a class discussion, start another class discussion, have a dialogue with me.... E-journals are not evaluated; however, remember that you are writing to be read and understood. The e-journals give you a chance to practice writing--the more practice you have with writing, the better writer you will become.

A sample e-journal entry:

After today's lesson in leading the class on the events that occurred in chapter 8 of Florman's book, I have a new respect for teachers. It seemed so obvious that Carolyn and I were the only ones who read the chapter, and it was very difficult to ensue a conversation with the rest of the class when everything that I told them seemed like new news. I greatly respect the teacher's ability to do an interesting lesson plan, and it is hard to somehow find a general enough subject for everyone to be able to make comment on it.

It seemed like a real struggle to find a way to get everyone to understand what we were saying, and it really made me wish that other people had read the chapter. However, when it was not my turn, I didn't care at all that people had not read the book. People really do not appreciate how hard it is for a teacher to be able to make you learn when you refuse to do your half of the work.

RESPONSE PAPERS

I would like you to write a thoughtful response to what we are reading in class focusing on whatever the prevailing theme for the week is. The key, though, is to make, support, and conclude some argument in two pages. For example, you may wish to argue for or against a point in the texts, find a new angle on what we're studying, or tie something from the texts to "something else." What you should focus on is clearly stating a point, supporting that point, then concluding the point. As you write, reread what you have written to see if there are any gaps in structure, logic, or argument. If you read something and think "why?" or "why not?" or "what then?" or "what's the point?" or "where did this come from?", then there is a gap that needs to be filled.

As the weeks progress, I expect the responses to become more complex in that you are forming connections from the readings to "something else" (other readings, theory, practice, life, etc.). The paper should have fewer than 500 words--or approximately two pages of typed text. And the paper should be thorough which assumes a clear thesis, a developed body, and a tight conclusion. And it must have a title. Write about one thing well, thoroughly, thoughtfully, and concisely.

These papers are evaluated--by your peers. You will be divided into several groups, and each week, you will receive all the papers from a particular group to evaluate. Instead of typical letter grades, your evaluations will be (plus), (check), or (minus), and you will provide feedback to the writers. We will cover more of this in our evaluation model session. But as with any paper, make sure before you submit your copies, have a study partner review and comment on your paper, and when you do a final revision, you spell-check and proofread.

PROJECT GENESIS

Prior to the Fall 1999 semester, I considered revamping my traditional writing class. A colleague had experimented giving the students in his writing class almost *carte blanche* with their learning environment. He posed a question to the class the first day: "Well, what are we going to do?" With some missteps along the way, the class developed a community service project.

The students had to conceive, develop, and produce the event themselves. This included *thinking* about what to do and how to do it (and all the issues surrounding it), *reading* about charity events and school needs, *talking* to sponsors about the project to obtain financial support and the university to secure facilities, *coordinating* the efforts of the group, *writing* proposals to sponsors and the public as well as their own analyses of the project.

I decided to apply this concept to my second-semester seminar within the theme of studying the human condition at this junction of millennia. We read works on science, technology, ethics, relationship, and activism (see attached syllabi). Each class session, a student facilitated the discussion for the day's reading, and a weekly response paper on a class topic was required.

THE FOUR CLASSES

FIRST CLASS: FALL 1999

Number of students: 20
Characteristics of class: Off-sequence, second-semester writing class. Eight of the 20 had not passed the class in the previous spring semester. All students were sophomores or juniors.
Project: Group Dynamics
Event: Weekend Camping Trip
Web site: http://www.american.edu/dbeach/f99101/index.html

This was the pilot course. I wanted to see what would happen if I allowed an unstructured setting which gave the students the primary voice in the class. The result: chaos.

Six weeks into a fourteen-week semester, the class still had not decided its project. I allowed them to choose the role that I would play in the project. They were divided on what my role would be--either a full-fledged group member or not involved at all. After much debate, I was voted a member of the group, and as a full-fledged member, I participated in the decision-making. Under consideration were organizing a charity, studying group dynamics, and building ore re-building something (a Habitat for Humanity house, a playground, and a boat "to sail into the millennium").

We chose to study group dynamics and take a camping trip as the field study. Deciding on where to go took another two weeks. Deciding individual topics took another two weeks. The *manager* in me wanted to take control of the project, but I continued to let it move on its own course at its own pace. The group eventually split into six areas of concentration: Perfect Group, Leadership, Communication, Trust, Disruption, and Group Analysis.

Several students suggested some bonding experience prior to the camping. Everyone thought it would be a good idea to share a meal, so I offered my house as a meeting point. Problem--my house is not in a convenient location to the school, and few students had cars. But they decided to carpool or take public transportation. On a Tuesday, we set a date for the following Sunday evening, and I asked people to contact me to let me know how much food to prepare. By Saturday evening, only one student had responded, so I cancelled the dinner citing the rudeness of not responding to an invitation. My action, however, became the incident that created a sense of mission within the group, I think in order not to disappoint me. From this point, the project moved smoothly ahead.

The only "rule" that I made was that the camping trip was to be considered an extension of class and, therefore, the group must abide by institutional policies and regulations. When I asked the students to sign a pledge that there no alcohol or drugs would be consumed during the trip, some felt this was an infringement of their personal freedom, even though all but one had not yet attained legal drinking age.

Each student researched his or her area of concentration, and each group planned some event for the camping trip. For example, I was a member of the Trust group, and our event was to have a 90-minute period during the dinner hour when all communication had to be non-verbal. After dark, two female students came down to the campfire and asked if anyone had put a threatening message on the table by their tent. The message read "See you later" with a knife stuck into the table. No one admitted doing it at the time. Several hours later, after much disruption, the members of the Disruption group admitted they had achieved the goal of their event. The next class session, we had a lengthy discussion on the difference between fear and disruption.

Towards the end of the semester, with the projects nearing completed, I had a sinking feeling that the experiment had been a disaster. That was until I read their papers and their evaluations of the semester. The papers were some of the most thoroughly-research and well-written papers I had ever received. The students had incorporated into their papers field observations, interviews, surveys, textual research, and online research. They thought through their topics critically, and many worked collaboratively.

Some of the students' comments:

> I began to focus more on learning from my peers and classmates, rather than just the professors. Everyone in the room has something very valuable to offer me. --Kelly
>
> This class project is attempting to do what college may take four year to evoke. We are now forced to think for ourselves and take the first step all by ourselves. --Jen
>
> I feel that any attempt at an organized project with a single group of 20+ students will most likely end in failure....The class has exhibited a tendency to explore ideas that "sound good" without

giving much thought to the underlying requirements and effort that will be required.... The class, like most groups, exhibits a tendency to exert far too much time and effort on trivial issues, while ignoring the more pressing or difficult questions it faces. --Ken

There's much more behind this than 10 pages and a grade in December. We all need to ask ourselves "why?" --Ryan

Those that propose that we should step out of our comfort zones refuse to give up theirs when it [sic] is threatened. --Brad

You are not our TEACHER but an instructor and mentor. Those two things are quite different because they make you to incorporate your self into the student body. --Ania

(after the dinner debacle): I'm expecting a rather strong retort from you (which is understandable and deserving on our part), but I'd like to turn it into something productive if at all possible. Something beyond a "what did we learn from this?" How you can trust us again? How we can communicate better? How [did the lack of] leadership played a role in this. --Ryan

I am seriously waiting for this to turn into *The Real World*. I think it would be great. I mean, everything falling apart and then having to get back together. --Brian

Before heading on this camping trip, I had feared that the class would break up into little cliques and not really mingle together. However, my fears were unnecessary. I found myself talking with and listening to people who I didn't even acknowledge in class Surprisingly, it wasn't bad. I do agree that some kids did turn out to be the jerks I always thought they were, but on the whole I discovered a lot of nice people. --Sweta

Learning was our goal, however, I think that a key point is that some of what we learned is extraneous to our research. --Kelly

What have we become? I have always been told that it is unhealthy to throw up, it damages your body. So is this regurgitation of words healthy for us? Shouldn't it matter how much I have learned in general or how I am apply[ing] concepts to my life? Apparently not because I forgot that $C_6H_{12}O_6$ is a sugar. But that doesn't matter in life, no one is ever going to care that I know that. However it is important that I know how my body works or how the mind functions or how to write a clear and concise thesis. It is the quality of the education, not the

> quantity....It is the teachers that open your eyes to a new way of viewing the world, not the ones that stuff facts and figures down your throat. This is the world that we should live in. --Brian

SECOND CLASS: SPRING 2000

Number of students: 21
Characteristics of class: Regular sequence, second-semester writing class. All but two students were freshmen.
Project: Influences in an Evolving Society
Event: None
Web site: http://www.american.edu/dbeach/S0034/index.html

After a winter break of reflection, I redefined my role in the class to be guide and mentor and gave the course a bit more structure. I set a firm deadline for when the topic had to be chosen and benchmark dates for the project components. This alleviated *all* the problems I encountered in the previous semester.

This class eagerly took on the task of brainstorming project topics resulting in a myriad of ideas and possibilities. The problem was that students held on tightly to their ideas. So instead of forcing a group project surrounding an event, the students developed an umbrella topic, Influences in an Evolving Society, and researched within the following more focused groups: Entertainment, Humanity, Religion, Sports, and Technology.

This class was one of the more talkative and focused classes I have had. Before I walked in the door, the students had begun discussing the reading. I enjoyed sitting back and listening to the discourse while occasionally interjecting some comments.

Some of the students' comments:

> Friday's class reminded me of elementary school. The idea of the entire class sitting around and brainstorming as someone wrote the ideas on the blackboard triggered different memories. I thought the class helped me to gain even better of an understanding of what to expect. --Chris

> Your teaching style is so much more motivating and encouraging. You reminded me of this, when I saw you sitting with us, as if you were one of us. This eliminates the intimidating "teacher/student" formal relationship. --Olga

> Re facilitation: I think it's a good learning experience to [sic] us. It puts us in the teacher's shoes and we can see how hard and frustrating it is when the class refuses to participate or offer information. -- Laura

I know that I still have to make a lot of improvements, but I don't think I have written as well as I have this past semester. --Peter

Until we did the class evaluations and other surveys, I did not realize how much I gained from the class by engaging in discussion often. I was pressured to find answers to questions that I otherwise would not have had to answer had I not participated in discussion. --Jessica G

The response papers helped me to become a better writer. I did not feel forced to write these papers because they were due every three weeks and there was not a specific topic to be written about. Being able to write about what I am interested in allows my creativity to flow more and to actually enjoy what I am writing about. The class taught me how to think above and beyond. We had to use different methods of thinking which I found interesting because I never took note of all the different methods. The class allowed me to not just accept things but rather to question. --Jessica Z

The class material was hard because it made you think--and you had no other choice but to "tough it out" and get through the piece. A welcomed benefit was that the "hard" piece I couldn't tolerate at first impacted me the most at the end. My writing improved to a degree, but not as much as my thought processes did. Most of this change can be attributed to a redefined view on controversial theories and ideas. --Jonathan

THIRD CLASS: SPRING 2000

Number of students: 20
Characteristics of class: Regular sequence, second-semester writing class. All but three students were freshmen.
Project: Group Dynamics
Event: Ropes Course
Web site: http://www.american.edu/dbeach/S0035/index.html

From the outset, this class wanted to go on a Ropes Course and study Group Dynamics. A ropes course consists of a series of obstacles that can only be achieved through a consolidated group effort. Many of the obstacles require some physical effort, most require emotional effort (for example, zipping across a 300m field tethered to a cable suspended 40m above the ground), and all require mental effort. The student who spearheaded the idea took complete charge of arranging the course and coordinating all the logistics.

As with the other groups, they formed smaller groups to direct their research. Subtopics to group dynamics included: Ropes Course History and Purpose, Leadership, Group Interaction,

Communication, Fear, and Gender. The ropes course provided every student with field research to incorporate into her or his individual project.

Some of the students' comments:

> I used to have problems speaking my thoughts clearly and the constant class interaction helped that process. The group project and response papers helped with time management. I have much more confidence speaking my mind and raising my hand to participate. --Laura
>
> We as students selected, planned, and executed mostly by ourselves. The small response papers were helpful for my writing skills. They made me concentrate on one small thing and develop it successfully. They made me think more often and deeper [sic] about what I was reading. I am not so hesitant to express what I think, even though it may be way off base. I think I leanred more by not having the pressure [of being tested]. -- Lynde
>
> By putting us into the groups, and making us all speak, I felt closer to my fellow students. --Steve
>
> But now that I know that it is more like a fun thing, I think that it will be a good bonding experience for the class. --Rachel
>
> I think you've also created a different kind of environment than in other classes. You've pretty much given us, your students, the right to choose what we write about, and how we run the group project. It's less like you are our professor, more like a guide, there to help us along the way. --Ryan
>
> It [the class] appears to be a little more creative and experimental than last semester's writing class. I think that it is extremely important to constantly be trying new ideas and using different approaches to teaching.... I am really enthusiastic about the next few months...the group project sounds like a really interesting way to bring teamwork and a sense of cooperative learning into the course. --Cara
>
> A ropes course would be fun, but I think that we would not learn enough as a class. Ropes courses are used to build trust and communication. --Blake
>
> I think it's too much of an outside commitment for a college writing class. I like the idea of a group research project but it

would have been easier if you gave us a topic and told us to research it. --Kim

FOURTH CLASS: SPRING 2000

Number of students: 15
Characteristics of class: Regular sequence, second-semester honors writing class. All students but one were freshmen.
Project: AIDS/HIV & Children
Event: Bring a Kid a Bear, a community service project
Website: http://www.american.edu/dbeach/BAKAB/

This class far surpassed what I thought could happen in a project. Taking their cue from an earlier project, the students focused on doing a charitable project, Bring a Kid a Bear, to provide teddy bears and stuffed animals to children with HIV disease while doing their research on AIDS in the world. Within a week of deciding their topic, the class developed the following mission statement:

> AIDS and HIV disease have claimed an astounding number of lives during the past 20 years. Sadly, a large percentage of these have been children. We, the Honors English class at American University, believe in the right of children to derive joy from every minute of their existence, and to this end we have conceived a project to effect some positive influence in the lives of some children with AIDS.
>
> - We will research and explore AIDS and HIV disease, locally and globally, with a primary (though not exclusive) focus on children.
> - We will enhance individual and community awareness of the magnitude of the plight of children with AIDS in the Washington DC area.
> - We will campaign for donations, financial or otherwise, to provide toys and various forms of entertainment to children with AIDS in Washington DC.
> - We will ensure that these children experience at least some of the joy and vivacity of youth that is their right.

Our weekly readings focused, unlike the other classes, on pedagogical styles. The purpose for this was to explore how we have been taught, how we learn best, and what pedagogical styles work best in certain situations.

Their research covered many areas of HIV/AIDS: geographic issues (Asia, Latin America), women, children, psychology, local service and care, AIDS in athletics, education, AIDS in entertainment. Their research projects, in the end, were by far the best and most thorough research projects I have ever received from a freshman writing course.

The Bring a Kid a Bear project was where the class stood out from others. Students wrote letters to toy stores, organizations, and individuals soliciting donations of teddy bears and stuffed

animals. They arranged a table in the student union to collect money. During the semester, the AIDS Quilt was displayed in the university arena, and the students set up their research in the information area outside the arena to answer questions about AIDS/HIV and their project. (This was the only table by a university organization--all other tables were exhibits by local AIDS service organizations.) A worker from another table asked what the group was doing, and, impressed by their dedication, suggested the students petition his group, a gay sports organization, for donations.

Some comments from the students:

> After this class, I can see that what happens in the classroom can be applied to the real world. Also I discovered that in the long run helping the community, like we did, is much more important than getting an A. --Amanda

> I found myself so involved with the project and that made me want to show up for class to present my findings as well as listen to what my classmates had to say. The response papers made me write with precision and clarity. The larger paper improved my writing by compiling various writing skills into one paper. --Trung

> I loved this course, and I have never before liked an English class. I learned that the real world and school can be connected in the classroom. --Anonymous

> Challenging, informal, almost to the point of unorthodox. The other students and the professor as well acted as equals. I felt I actually achieved something through a group project that was worthwhile.... I learned to work better with others. Made me realize how many parts of our education apply to the world around us. It showed me that a simple group of 20 or so students can make a very large impact on a chosen area. --Adam

WHAT DOES THE ADMINISTRATION THINK OF THIS?

University administrations look at numbers. Our student evaluations are always a factor in what we do. If most of the students are satisfied, the administration is satisfied. I have listed below the evaluation numbers for selected questions from the official university evaluation forms. In every case for every class, a strong majority of students were satisfied with the outcomes of these classes.

6--Strongly Agree
5--Agree

4--Neither Agree nor Disagree
3--Disagree
2--Strongly Disagree
1--No Opinion
Numbers correspond to percentage of respondents

	6	5	4	3	2	1
Satisfied with learning						
Class #1	50.0	35.7	7.1	0.0	7.1	0.0
Class #2	52.6	47.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Class #3	12.5	68.8	6.2	12.5	0.0	0.0
Class #4	42.9	42.9	7.1	7.1	0.0	0.0
I improved my writing skills						
Class #1	28.6	42.9	7.1	0.0	7.1	0.0
Class #2	52.6	31.6	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Class #3	37.5	50.0	6.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Class #4	28.6	64.3	0.0	7.1	0.0	0.0
Demanding course						
Class #1	42.9	50.0	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Class #2	42.9	42.9	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Class #3	31.2	62.5	6.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Class #4	36.8	52.6	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0

Numbers correspond to percentage of respondents
6--Superior
5--Very Good
4--Good
3--Satisfactory
2--Fair
1--Poor

Overall, the course is:						
Class #1	42.9	35.7	14.3	0.0	7.1	0.0
Class #2	26.3	63.2	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Class #3	12.5	56.2	18.8	6.2	0.0	6.2
Class #4	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

CONCLUSION

I cannot go back to teaching the way I used to. I have learned that giving students ownership of their course not only empowers them with their learning, but it vests them into the outcome. This is what we do once we are out of school. Why not do this in school? To me, there is no other answer than "Why not?"

One final student comment:
"I absolutely enjoyed this class, and I tell everyone this. We were given the freedom to pick our own class project, first of all. We had such little [sic] limits. We were trusted by our professor to make the right decisions or wrong one, for that matter, and to work together, even when he was not there. I put more effort in[to] this class than I did in any of my others from the first day to the last. And the thing is, that it was never easy."

EXHIBIT A: Syllabus for College Writing Seminar

SPRING 2000: LIT-101.035--COLLEGE WRITING SEMINAR: INTO THE MILLENNIUM

ROPER 118, 2:10 PM - 3:25 PM--TUESDAY & FRIDAY

INSTRUCTOR: DAVID BEACH
EMAIL: dbeach@american.edu
OFFICE: GRAY 213 **PHONE**: 202/885-2918
AOLIM: OGO61 **WEB**:
http://www.american.edu/dbeach/

OFFICE HOURS: M, 1:00pm – 3:00pm; Th, 9:00am – 11:00am; F, 10:00am – 12:00pm; and by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION, OVERVIEW, AND OBJECTIVES

Here we are at the (arguable) beginning of the millennium. What does that mean? Millennial mayhem? From Y2K to apocalypse, from Greenwich to Sydney, the world has been approaching the new millennium with a mixture of euphoria and fear. In this course, we will examine science, politics, the environment, and culture at the dawn of the new millennium as well as a semester-long examination of what the millennium means to us. Half the course will be devoted to reading and thinking about the texts and responding to them in a critical manner; the other half will be devoted to conception, development, and delivery of a semester-long research-based group project.

As far as this particular course and its meaning to your academic career, the second semester College Writing Seminar is designed to further develop those critical reading, thinking, and writing skills you developed in LIT-100. We will focus on the argument: how to create arguments and how to respond to them. We will also focus on reading with understanding, summarizing and synthesizing information accurately, and writing correct, reasoned prose. In this course, you will write for several purposes: to think; as a social act; as interdisciplinary exploration; and to communicate with clarity, grace, and correctness. Developing into an effective writer means: becoming aware of self and reflective of the self amongst others; discovering what is known and shaping it into what is thought; strengthening a sense of audience; recognizing the perspectives of different discourse communities; and learning the power of writing to discover and understand, inform and persuade.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Kushner, T. *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*
(Part I: *Millennium Approaches* and Part II: *Perestroika*)
Robbins, T. & Palmer, S. (eds.) *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem*
Sagan, C. *Billions and Billions*
Zinsser, W. *On Writing Well*, 6th Edition
other readings as directed

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Keene, M. & Adams, K. *Easy Access: The Reference Handbook for Writers*, 2nd Edition

CLASS POLICIES

E-MAIL

By virtue of being a registered student, you have the privilege of having an AU e-mail account. Account information and instructions can be obtained in the University Office of Information Technology (OIT), Mary Graydon Center, Room 231. You need to use your e-mail accounts for e-journals and to participate in the class discussion group. The easiest way to communicate with me outside of class is via e-mail. You may, if I'm online, contact me via AOL Instant Messenger™; however, use this judiciously. Do not "IM" me just to say "hi." Contain your IMs to course-related questions and concerns.

PAPER FORMAT
Presentation is part of the evaluation factor; it is important to remember that one way to "invite" reading of your work is to make it attractive.

CLASS ATTENDANCE
The Department of Literature requires that students attend class regularly and arrive on time. More than six absences in the semester, for whatever reason, may result in failure in the course. If you miss class, you are still responsible for all assignments.

STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM
AU's *Academic Regulations* states: "Because writing in the real world is recursive and collaborative, you will be able to avail yourself of a variety of resources—classmates, myself, Writing Center tutors—to assist you in your out-of-class writing projects. You may use your colleagues for feedback and support in generating the writing, but the ideas and language must be solely yours or properly cited. Any paper that an instructor believes has not been properly produced or documented, with all sources used appropriately cited, will be referred to the Office of the Dean of CAS [the College of Arts and Sciences] for possible action under the University's Academic Integrity Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code may have serious consequences, including failure for the course, a notation on the permanent record, suspension, or dismissal."

GRADING
This is a workshop/discussion/collaboration course in which you are expected to be an active participant. This means: attending class; being punctual; participating in group work; using the Writing Center; sharing your work with the class; doing assigned journal writing; and working effectively with your peers. Your final grade will be based upon the following criteria (see next page for factors):

50% Class work, assignments, & participation
50% Group project (divided by individual and group work)

INCOMPLETES
An incomplete will be given only if you have completed two-thirds of the work for the semester, have a C or better in the work completed, and have a truly valid reason (such as a lingering illness) for being unable to complete the remainder of the work on time. Poor time management will not be accepted as a reason for an incomplete.

E-JOURNALS
You will keep an e-mail journal (e-journal) during the semester. This is an opportunity for you to do some informal, reflective, ungraded writing. You may use the journals as exploration--a dialogue with me or as a dialogue with yourself, but these should be related to the class or writing, such as course texts, in-class presentations or activities, observations from outside class, or your own research and writing process. The point here is to practice responding to class activity and writing. You should submit at least one e-journal entry after every class session.

THE WRITING CENTER
The Writing Center provides students one-to-one tutoring—by trained undergraduate and graduate literature majors—on any aspect of writing. The Writing Center is located in Gray 206, x2991.

OTHER STUFF

When you are in class, beepers, cellular phones, and other personal electronic devices must be turned off. Food and drinks are allowed in the classroom as long as they are not noisy, smelly, or otherwise distracting.

All of us are different. This is good because we then learn about our differences, what makes each of us unique, and how to be tolerant of our differences. I want to promote an open class oom where all topics are open for discussion in a rational and unthreatening manner. With that said, the only thing I am intolerant of is intolerance. What is not acceptable in the classroom is any kind of bashing. This includes, but is not limited to, insensitive and/or inappropriate remarks, statements, or actions regarding race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual preference, political preference, ad infinitum.

Note: If you have a disability or situation of which I need to be aware, please meet with me privately to discuss it.

GRADING FACTORS

CLASS WORK, ASSIGNMENTS, & PARTICIPATION					
Daily participation	10			270	
<15m late	-5				
>15m late	-8				
Scavenger hunt				200	
E-journals	10/entry			250	
Response papers (9 papers)				1,080	
On time20		180			
Each day late	-10				
Paper	30-50	450			
Revision	0-20	180			
Peer review	0-10/paper	270			
Reading facilitation	0-200			200	
Subtotal (50% of final grade)				**2,000**	
GROUP PROJECT					
Individual work			1,000		
Group work			1,000		
Subtotal (50% of final grade)					**2,000**
TOTAL MAXIMUM POINTS				**4,000**	

FINAL GRADES

3,720-4,000	A
3,600-3,719	A-
3,520-3,599	B+
3,320-3,519	B
3,200-3,319	B-
3,120-3,199	C+
2,920-3,119	C
<2,920	C-, D, or F (to pass the course, you must have a C or better)

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES

Response papers	Every third class from Jan 25th to April 21st (total of 9)
Semester Project	Final project delivered on April 28th

SPRING 2000: LIT-101.035 SCHEDULE
(Reading dates are tentative and subject to slight modification.)

Jan. 18th	Introductions; Semester goals; Freewriting
Jan. 21st	Research/scavenger hunt; Zinsser, Part I
Jan. 25th	Response #1; Zinsser, Part II
Jan. 28th	Research/scavenger hunt presentations; Zinsser, Part III, Ch. 11-15, 18
Feb. 1st	Zinsser, Part IV
Feb. 4th	Response #2; Sagan, Ch. 1-3
Feb. 8th	Sagan, Ch. 4-6
Feb. 11th	Sagan, Ch. 7-9
Feb. 15th	Response #3; Sagan, Ch. 10-13
Feb. 18th	Sagan, Ch. 14-16
Feb. 22nd	Sagan, Ch. 17-19
Feb. 25th	Response #4; Kushner, *Millennium Approaches*, Act I
Feb. 29th	Kushner, *Millennium Approaches*, Act II
Mar. 3rd	Kushner, *Millennium Approaches*, Act III
Mar. 7th	Response #5; Kushner, *Perestroika*, Acts I-II
Mar. 10th	Kushner, *Perestroika*, Acts III-IV
Mar. 21st	Response #6; Kushner, *Perestroika*, Act V, Epilogue
Mar. 24th	Aho, "The Apocalypse of Modernity" in Robbins & Palmer (pp 61-72)
Mar. 28th	Aho (continued)
Mar. 31st	Response #7; Lee, "The Millennial Ideology of 'Earth First!'" in Robbins & Palmer (pp 119-128)
Apr. 4th	Lee (continued)
Apr. 7th	Bozeman, "Technological Millenarianism in the United States" in Robbins & Palmer (pp 139-158)
Apr. 11th	Response #8; Bozeman (continued)
Apr. 14th	NO CLASS—Instructor at conference
Apr. 18th	Palmer, "The Feminization of the Millennium in New Religious Movements" in Robbins & Palmer (pp 159-174)
Apr. 21st	Response #9; Palmer (continued)
Apr. 25th	Looking back on the semester
Apr. 28th	Group project due; Course/group/individual evaluations
May 9th	Scheduled Final Exam, 2:10pm-4:40pm

SPRING 2000: LIT-131.005—HONORS ENGLISH II: CONSTRUCTING LEARNING

GRAY 127, 11:20AM - 12:35PM—MONDAY & THURSDAY

INSTRUCTOR: DAVID BEACH
EMAIL: dbeach@american.edu
OFFICE: GRAY 213 **PHONE**: 202/885-2918
AOLIM: OGO61 **WEB**:
http://www.american.edu/dbeach/

OFFICE HOURS: M, 1:00pm – 3:00pm; Th, 9:00am – 11:00am; F, 10:00am – 12:00pm; and by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION, OVERVIEW, AND OBJECTIVES

We've arrived at the new millennium! How will we approach the rest of our lives with what we have learned and what we have yet to learn? Why do we learn what we learn? In this course, we will examine our own learning processes, think about how and what we learn, and apply these concepts to the conception, development, and delivery of a semester-long research-based group project. Each attendee will be expected to do extensive research and writing surrounding the project which will be published on the Internet.

As far as this particular course and its meaning to your academic career, the second semester Honors English course is designed to further develop those critical reading, thinking, and writing skills you developed in LIT-130 as well as participate in more extensive and vigorous research. In this course, you will write for several purposes: to think; as a social act; as interdisciplinary exploration; and to communicate with clarity, grace, and correctness. Developing into an effective writer means: becoming aware of self and reflective of the self amongst others; discovering what is known and shaping it into what is thought; strengthening a sense of audience; recognizing the perspectives of different discourse communities; and learning the power of writing to discover and understand, inform and persuade.

REQUIRED READINGS

selections from the following to be distributed:
Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
Rose, Mike. *Lives on the Boundary*
Tompkins, Jane. *A Life in School*

RECOMMENDED

Keene, M. & Adams, K. *Easy Access: The Reference Handbook for Writers*, 2nd Edition

CLASS POLICIES

E-MAIL

By virtue of being a registered student, you have the privilege of having an AU e-mail account. Account information and instructions can be obtained in the University Office of Information Technology (OIT), Mary Graydon Center, Room 231. You need to use your e-mail accounts for e-journals and to participate in the class discussion group. The easiest way to communicate with me outside of class is via e-mail. You may, if I'm online, contact me via AOL Instant Messenger™; however, use this judiciously. Do not "IM" me just to say "hi." Contain your IMs to course-related questions and concerns.

PAPER FORMAT

Presentation is part of the evaluation factor; it is important to remember that one way to "invite" reading of your work is to make it attractive.

CLASS ATTENDANCE
The Department of Literature requires that students attend class regularly and arrive on time. More than six absences in the semester, for whatever reason, may result in failure in the course. If you miss class, you are still responsible for all assignments.

STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM
AU's *Academic Regulations* states: "Because writing in the real world is recursive and collaborative, you will be able to avail yourself of a variety of resources—classmates, myself, Writing Center tutors—to assist you in your out-of-class writing projects. You may use your colleagues for feedback and support in generating the writing, but the ideas and language must be solely yours or properly cited. Any paper that an instructor believes has not been properly produced or documented, with all sources used appropriately cited, will be referred to the Office of the Dean of CAS [the College of Arts and Sciences] for possible action under the University's Academic Integrity Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code may have serious consequences, including failure for the course, a notation on the permanent record, suspension, or dismissal."

GRADING
This is a workshop/discussion/collaboration course in which you are expected to be an active participant. This means: attending class; being punctual; participating in group work; using the Writing Center; sharing your work with the class; doing assigned journal writing; and working effectively with your peers. Your final grade will be based upon the following criteria (see attached sheet for factors):

50% Class work, assignments, & participation
50% Group project (divided by individual and group work)

INCOMPLETES
An incomplete will be given only if you have completed two-thirds of the work for the semester, have a C or better in the work completed, and have a truly valid reason (such as a lingering illness) for being unable to complete the remainder of the work on time. Poor time management will not be accepted as a reason for an incomplete.

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You will keep an e-mail journal (e-journal) during the semester. This is an opportunity for you to do some informal, reflective, ungraded writing. You may use the journals as exploration--a dialogue with me or as a dialogue with yourself, but these should be related to the class or writing, such as course texts, in-class presentations or activities, observations from outside class, or your own research and writing process. The point here is to practice responding to class activity and writing. You should submit at least one e-journal entry after every class session.

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The Writing Center provides students one-to-one tutoring—by trained undergraduate and graduate literature majors—on any aspect of writing. The Writing Center is located in Gray 206, x2991.

OTHER STUFF
When you are in class, beepers, cellular phones, and other personal electronic devices must be turned off. Food and drinks are allowed in the classroom as long as they are not noisy, smelly, or otherwise distracting.

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includes, but is not limited to, insensitive and/or inappropriate remarks, statements, or actions regarding race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual preference, political preference, ad infinitum.

Note: If you have a disability or situation of which I need to be aware, please meet with me privately to discuss it.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES

Position papers	Every other Monday starting Jan. 31st (total of six)
Semester Project	Final project delivered on May 1st

SPRING 2000: LIT-131.005 SCHEDULE
(Reading dates are tentative and subject to slight modification.)

Jan. 20th	Introductions; Semester goals; Freewriting
Jan. 24th	Research/scavenger hunt; Freire, intro and Ch. 1
Jan. 27th	**Research/scavenger hunt presentations**; Freire, intro and Ch. 1
Jan. 31st	**Position paper**; Freire, Ch. 2
Feb. 3rd	Freire, Ch. 2
Feb. 7th	Freire, Ch. 3
Feb. 10th	Freire, Ch. 3
Feb. 14th	**Position paper**; Freire, Ch. 4
Feb. 17th	Freire, Ch. 4
Feb. 21st	**Project outline (both individual and group)**; Tompkins
Feb. 24th	Tompkins
Feb. 28th	**Position paper**; Tompkins
Mar. 2nd	Tompkins
Mar. 6th	Tompkins
Mar. 9th	**Literature Review**; Tompkins
Mar. 20th	**Position paper**; Tompkins
Mar. 23rd	Rose
Mar. 27th	Rose
Mar. 30th	**Draft of project paper**; Rose
Apr. 3rd	**Position paper**; Rose
Apr. 6th	Rose
Apr. 10th	Rose
Apr. 13th	NO CLASS (Instructor at conference); Conferences on 4/7, 4/10, 4/11 in lieu of class
Apr. 17th	**Position paper**; Microlessons
Apr. 20th	Microlessons
Apr. 24th	Microlessons
Apr. 27th	Looking back on the semester
May 1st	**Group project due**; Course/group/individual evaluations
May 8th	Scheduled Final Exam, 11:20am-1:50pm

SPRING 2000: LIT-131.005--CONSTRUCTING LEARNING
GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION

Please take a few minutes to evaluate the members of the group. Rate each person's participation, involvement, and intellectual engagement in both the project and the class. This will count as 1/6 of the project grade (1/12 of the overall grade).

RATING SCALE:
1--DID NOT PARTICIPATE, WAS NOT INVOLVED, DID NOT CONTRIBUTE INTELLECTUALLY TO THE GROUP
2--RARELY PARTICIPATED, WAS INVOLVED, CONTRIBUTED INTELLECTUALLY TO THE GROUP
3--SOMETIMES PARTICIPATED, WAS INVOLVED, CONTRIBUTED INTELLECTUALLY TO THE GROUP
4--OFTEN PARTICIPATED, WAS INVOLVED, CONTRIBUTED INTELLECTUALLY TO THE GROUP
5--ALWAYS PARTICIPATED, WAS INVOLVED, & CONTRIBUTED INTELLECTUALLY TO THE GROUP

Jennifer	1	2	3	4	5
Simone	1	2	3	4	5
Dominique	1	2	3	4	5
Jim	1	2	3	4	5
Erika	1	2	3	4	5
Tammy	1	2	3	4	5
Nick	1	2	3	4	5
Jennifer	1	2	3	4	5
Adam	1	2	3	4	5
Amanda	1	2	3	4	5
Josh	1	2	3	4	5
Laura	1	2	3	4	5
Sarah	1	2	3	4	5
Trung	1	2	3	4	5
Victoria	1	2	3	4	5

I'd also like to rate your own participation, involvement, and intellectual engagement in the project as well as the class and provide some narrative comments as to why you rate yourself the way you do. This will count as 1/6 of the project grade (1/12 of the overall grade).

YOUR NAME: _____ 1 2 3 4 5

Comments about your self-evaluation:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE